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## A CHRISTMAS STORY

It's just a small, white envelope on a branch of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches for the past 10 years or so.

It all began because my husband Mike hated Christmas—not the true meaning of Christmas, but its commercial aspects: overspending, frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and dusting powder for Grandma, gifts given in desperation because you couldn't think of anything else. Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, and ties. I sought something special just for Mike. The inspiration came in an unusual way.

Our son Kevin, who was then 12, was wrestling for his school; shortly before Christmas, there was a non-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church. These poor youngsters, dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed the only thing holding them together, were a sharp contrast to our boys in blue-and-gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes. As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear, light helmets designed to protect wrestlers' ears. It was a luxury the ragtag team obviously could not afford. Well, we walloped them, taking every weight class. And as each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that couldn't acknowledge defeat.

Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly; "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have lots of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them." Mike loved all kids—and he knew them, having coached football, baseball and lacrosse. That's when the idea for his present came.

That afternoon I went to a sporting goods store, bought assorted wrestling headgear and shoes, and sent them anonymously to the inner city church. On Christmas Eve, I placed the envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me. His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years. Each Christmas, I followed the tradition—sending handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, giving a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground the week before Christmas, and on and on.

The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened Christmas morning and our children, ignoring their new toys, stood wide-eyed as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree. The toys gave way to more practical presents,

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## CORNERSTONE



Another year has flown by, and another holiday season is upon us. Although we were tested both individually and collectively, I prefer to remember the accomplishments of the past year. Very high on my list is the Thomas Wolfe Centennial—the fine publication, postal stamp, and programs that focused attention for an entire year on Asheville's most famous son. The Wolfe staff and others did a superb job in planning and executing the celebration.

The end of the year also brings the sadness of saying goodbye to Secretary Betty Ray McCain and Deputy Secretary Betsy Buford. For eight years they have worked hard to improve our historic sites program. Many advances have resulted from their efforts, but among them all the money secured from the state Reserve for Repairs and Renovations has touched virtually every site. We will miss them as leaders, and we certainly will miss Secretary McCain's sense of humor. I know I speak for all of us when I wish them the very best in the days and years to come.

The transition team for Governor-elect Mike Easley is already in place and has met with Dr. Crow and other division directors. We should know soon who our new secretary will be. We look forward to working with the incoming administration. In particular I look forward to introducing them to our sites and the fine work each of you do.

In conclusion, I want to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a safe, happy New Year! It has been an honor to work with you over the years, and I look forward to a successful 2001. Happy Holidays!

(Jim McPherson)

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but the envelope never lost its allure. The story doesn't end there.

You see, we lost Mike last year due to cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was wrapped in grief and barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree. In the morning it was joined by three more. Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition has grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren standing around the tree with wide-eyed anticipation as their fathers take down the envelope.

Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit, will always be with us.

(Anonymous; passed on courtesy of Beverly Boyette)

## CONFEDERATE ARTILLERY FIRES AGAIN AT FORT FISHER

On Saturday, December 2, Fort Fisher hosted a whole battery of Confederate artillery! From 1:00 to 6:00 P.M. guns from Reilly and Adam's Batteries, along with our own artillery, fired from the parapets of the western bastion. This was the first time since the Civil War that so many guns have fired from the old gun pits. Every gun emplacement had a weapon! We closed the tour trail on the north



side of the mounds so that the safety range of the guns would not be violated. Starting on the left (west) by Shepherd's Battery, we had John Meadow's Confederate Coehorn mortar. Our Napoleon was in the second gun emplacement, and Jack Travis's 10-pounder Parrott was in the third position. Larry Pittman's 3.5-inch Vicksburg rifle was in the fourth gun emplacement, Mike Vance's model 1841 6-pounder (my personal favorite) was in the fifth emplacement, and Donny Shannon's 10-pounder Parrott finished the compliment of cannons.

We fired by piece from the left. The visitor center shook from the concussion of the cannon. All felt the military might of Fort Fisher. We fired twice every thirty minutes until the end of the day. The Fort Fisher crew and gun gave demonstrations between firing on an impromptu basis. In the spirit of equal opportunity history, Lori Rifenburg, Susi Clontz, Millie Hart, and Cheyenne Corbitt got a chance to shoot a round.

Visitors had a rare treat, when we led a group of about fifty up onto the mounds for a very close look at the guns. Rarely do we allow visitors on the earthworks. Those persons who attended enjoyed our little program, although visitation was low due to bad weather and lackluster media coverage. I had sent out the press release a full month before the event, but only the island papers gave us pre-event coverage. Because two of the guns were from Raleigh, the snow on the other side of I-95 caused us to cut the event short.

The Fort Fisher Restoration Committee provided an excellent meal of fried chicken and Brunswick stew. We all got home before the sleet started, except for Donny Shannon and Mike Vance, who camped out that night. Could they still be out there? Thanks to all staff and volunteers who helped out. A special thanks to site interpreter Kenny Koch, who towed the guns up the mounds.

(Leland Smith)

### **CSS *NEUSE* HOLDS SCHOOL OF THE SAILOR**

Our fall living history program at the CSS *Neuse* was held November 18-19. The activity was canceled in 1999 after the flooding from Hurricane Floyd, but that gave us time to concentrate on making the program better. This year we expanded the venture by asking several more infantry units to participate, adding blacksmiths, and having a larger naval contingent. Our goal was to have eighty military participants, the approximate size of the crew of the *Neuse* in the spring of 1864. Eighty-one military and twenty-three civilian reenactors signed up for the program. Due to bad weather, participation was about half of those registered.

The men had classes in gunnery positions and safe firing drill (thanks to Fred Burgess and the Bentonville ordnance rifle), basic marlinespike seamanship, naval customs, ship rigging type and identification, naval ranks and courtesies, and nautical terms. The camp had reveille at 0630 in the morning; lessons began at 0815 and continued through the day. The men of the army had the chance to learn new lessons and be a part of a different type of program than they were usually accustomed to presenting. The members of the Tidewater Naval Living History Association did an outstanding job on the lessons they presented and were very knowledgeable on the subjects. The army men were diligent in learning their lessons. We also had a surgeon and his equipment in camp to be sure the men were healthy enough for life aboard ship.

During the war years, civilians made many contributions to the troops. The Secesh Ladies of the 27th North Carolina Troops interpreted this support to visitors with demonstrations of making beeswax candles, washing clothes, and making shirts and other clothes for the men in the field. The ladies also gave talks on customs of mourning the many military deaths.

Due to bad weather the event ended at noon Sunday. Our thanks go out to all those who braved the cold and rain to make the program possible. Many plans were made for the 2001 event, including more active drill and classes. This is an activity that is growing each year and is unique in its presentation.

(Donny Taylor)

### **HALIFAX RECEIVES GRANT FOR TAP ROOM**

Historic Halifax has received \$17,000 in matching funds from the N.C. Department of Commerce's Rural Tourism Development Grant Program. The money will be used for the Tap Room project to enhance hands-on aspects of the proposed exhibits in that small structure. With the new funds, visitors may be able to hold a clay pipe, play a board game popular two centuries ago, or relax while trying out a reproduction rope bed. We feel that this interactive approach will make the building much more popular with guests, particularly children, than mere passive displays.

The Tap Room grant is one of twenty-four proposals funded by the program, which attracted more than one hundred different requests for funds. The program is designed to help rural counties with limited resources lure more tourists.

(Gloria Edwards)

## CHRISTMAS IN COLONIAL NORTH CAROLINA

Two centuries ago the Feast of Christmas was observed differently from today. If one observed Christmas at all, it was a time of food, drink, and merriment before the cold and dark days of deep winter. It was an adult celebration, having little in common with our modern child- and family-oriented holiday.

Not all Christians observed Christmas. For Anglicans, Catholics, Lutherans, and most other German Protestant sects Christmas was an important holiday and its ancient traditions were lovingly reestablished in the New World. Puritan Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers strongly opposed the feast day, seeing it as a dangerous holdover from dark, pagan times. Christmas, especially its religious observance, was the source of bitter denominational quarrels during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The riotous festivities of Tudor and Stuart England were banned by Cromwell and the Puritan Parliament in the 1650s. A similar ban in Massachusetts was not officially lifted until the nineteenth century. As a result, Christmas lost its centrality for many people as a spiritual festival and did not regain its importance for most people in Great Britain and the English colonies until the nineteenth century. Scottish Presbyterians applied many "Christmas" traditions to New Year's Day, thus salving their stern Calvinist consciences.

In North Carolina Christmas was observed by Anglicans, Lutherans, and Moravians. For all three groups, church and dinner were the principal features, although each had individual customs brought from their homelands. A number of these traditions survived into the nineteenth century and were adopted by their neighbors as Christmas gained a more universal acceptance.

Anglicans began with the season of Advent, the four Sundays before Christmas that prepared the congregation for the miracle of the birth of the Christ Child. Christmas Day itself was the first of the twelve days of Christmas, the period from December 25 when Jesus was born to January 6, which marked the arrival of the Wise Men with their gifts.

Traditionally a day or two before Christmas Day holly, ivy, and mistletoe were gathered from the woods to decorate the house. There was no lavish use of costly tinsel or ribbon; any color came from the red of berries and glitter came from well-polished silver, pewter, or brass. Instead of a tree, a kissing-ball was hung, made of holly and decorated with items such as nuts, fruit, and ribbon.

Festivities on the day itself began with a hearty breakfast, then Communion at church, then home to a large dinner in mid afternoon with guests. In wealthier houses the meal included four or five kinds of meat, vegetables, breads, pies, cakes, syllabubs, wine, ale, rum, rum punch, and whiskey. The meal concluded with a round of toasts to the king, parliament (after 1775, perhaps to Washington and Congress), pretty ladies, old friends, repeal of taxes, the king's soldiers, bringers of civil peace, and the ladies again (hic! God bless' em.), as long as the punch lasted.

The evening saw games and music in the parlor. Blind Man's Bluff, Hunt the Slipper, charades, and other games now relegated to children were popular with all

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ages. Careful parents made sure children could play a musical instrument or sing without embarrassment in company, so all ages contributed to an evening's entertainment. The evening ended with gunfire to salute neighbors who lived too far away to visit but close enough to hear the guns.

Gifts were not important in an Anglican Christmas. Those who got gifts were apprentices, servants, and slaves, who received coins, clothes, and extra food. Sweethearts and children might also get a "remembrancer"—a toy or knick-knack such as a small book, diary, or packet of ribbons.

German Lutherans and Moravians also celebrated the day with church and food, and decorated church and home with evergreens and candles. By 1752 Germans introduced the Christmas tree, lit with candles, in America. Candles in windows were also a German custom of various Protestant sects. December 24 was the day of *Kristkindlein* (Christ Child), when presents were exchanged in honor of the Child. Again, the gifts were not lavish, usually Bibles, beautifully printed bible verses for hanging on a wall, or something useful and handmade.

With the coming of the Revolution religious controversies, including Christmas, became less important than political and economic issues. After the war churches lost a significant amount of control, and celebrations such as Christmas became universal holidays for Americans. Customs spread; decorated trees became popular in America long before they arrived in England. St. Nicholas spread beyond the Dutch children of New York to include even the children of Puritan New England. Carols were introduced from throughout Europe.

In America Christmas slowly became a legal holiday, with Alabama the first state to make it so in 1836. North Carolina established the holiday in 1881.

(Elizabeth Faison)

### **DOT MUSEUM TOP LEVEL DOMAIN COMING**

Ever wonder why Internet addresses often seem to end with .com, .edu, or .org? These three names are called "top level domains" (TLDs), and there are only a limited number of them. In 2001, however, there should be more TLDs. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers has approved several new TLDs. In that new group is .museum, among the seven new approved top level domains out of forty-seven recent requests. This is the first Internet TLD address expansion in more than a decade.

Museums can continue to use their existing domain names or may wish to add or change to a new .museum name.

The American Association of Museums (AAM) has been supporting work of the Museum Domain Management Association (MuseDoma), which secured approval for the new TLDs. It will be at least several months before museums (and perhaps historic sites with visitor centers and museums) can actually get a .museum address. MuseDoma is likely to be the coordinating agency for the process.

For more information, visit [www.musedoma.org](http://www.musedoma.org) or e-mail the AAM's Barry Szczesny at [barry@aam-us.org](mailto:barry@aam-us.org).

### UNDERGROUND RAILROAD SYMPOSIUM HELD IN GREENSBORO

On Saturday, November 18, the North Carolina Civil War Tourism Council sponsored a free educational symposium, Underground Railroad: Romance & Reality, at the Greensboro Historical Museum.

Prof. Adrienne Israel of Guilford College began the day with an impressive presentation on the history and background of the underground railroad, concentrating on the role of Guilford County. Levi Coffin and his cousin Vestal Coffin were involved in the underground railroad "line" from Guilford to Richmond, Indiana. Archibald Curry, head of one of the thirty-one free black families in the county, used his "free papers" to get at least fifteen men to freedom in Indiana.

Next Barbara Tagger, National Park Service (NPS) regional coordinator for the underground railroad program, presented a slide program on the various underground railroad sites in this country, Canada, and Mexico.

The keynote speaker was Charles Blockson, research historian on the NPS's underground railroad project. The theme of his address was the need to commemorate, not commercialize, the underground railroad. Speaking to the symposium's topic of whether the underground railroad was myth or reality, he said, "American history is part fiction, part legend. People died. It did exist. It wasn't a legend. It was part of slavery, and slavery is our holocaust."

Beverly Gage, author of "The Underground Railroad" in *The Nation* (March 13, 2000), spoke on the history of the underground railroad as an idea. Citing Larry Gara's book, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (University of Kentucky Press, 1961, 1996), Gage stated that, "The network didn't exist as a well organized entity. The white abolitionist was not the central player in this drama."

Next Prof. Loren Schweninger of UNC at Greensboro (co-author with John Hope Franklin of *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*) spoke on runaway slaves. Based on his and Franklin's research, Schweninger concluded that the vast majority of runaways were "laying out"—that is, hiding out in the neighborhood (in woods, swamps, and so forth). The main "laying out" was done by individuals, not groups. Most runaway slaves went south, east, or west. He estimated that only 20 percent went north. Contrary to the popular notion of an effective underground railroad, Schweninger said that the "vast majority of runaways had no help."

Attendees then traveled by bus to Mendenhall Plantation, home of Richard Mendenhall, a Quaker antislavery activist. There we viewed one of the two existing false-bottomed wagons used to haul "precious cargo" (escaped slaves).

(Kent McCoury)

**IREDELL SITE HOSTS BOOK SIGNING**

On Friday and Saturday, December 8 and 9, James Iredell Sr. biographer and former N.C. Supreme Court Justice Willis Whichard signed copies of his new book at the James Iredell Home Site in Edenton. The book, which grew out of Judge Whichard's doctoral thesis at the University of Virginia, is the first full-length biography of Justice James Iredell to be published.

To Edentonians James Iredell Sr. is well known as one of the town's most illustrious sons. Although born in England, he arrived alone—a youth of seventeen—in Edenton in 1768. He came to take up duties as His Majesty's Agent, collecting revenues for shipping entering and leaving Port Roanoke. Ultimately, after the Revolution, President George Washington appointed him to the first U.S. Supreme Court upon that body's establishment in 1790.

Iredell's biographer, Willis P. Whichard, has had an equally distinguished career in both the legislature and the court system of North Carolina. Born in Durham, he attended the public schools of that city before earning degrees at the University of North Carolina (B.A. and J.D.) and the University of Virginia (LL.M and S.J.D.). He was a practicing attorney before his election to the North Carolina House in 1970. He served in the N.C. Senate from 1974 to 1980.

Judge Whichard began his judicial career in 1980 with his appointment and subsequent election to the North Carolina Court of Appeals and began his Supreme Court tenure in 1986. He is the only person in North Carolina history to have served in both houses of the legislature and at both appellate court levels of the state judicial system.

Upon his retirement from the high court in 1998, he accepted the position of professor of law and dean of the Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law at Campbell University.

Whichard married Leona Paschal of Siler City, North Carolina, in 1961. They have two daughters, both residents of Durham, and three grandchildren.

The book signing was well attended, scheduled as it was during the annual Candlelight Tour in Edenton. The book, *Justice James Iredell* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), is currently stocked in the gift shop of the Historic Edenton visitor center.

(Bill Strong)

**RATING THE PRESIDENTS**

With the extremely close election of 2000 finally decided, history will ultimately decide how to evaluate the new administration. Meanwhile seventy-eight scholars, both liberal and conservative, in a recent poll by the Federalist Society, evaluated the thirty-nine previous presidents. Numbers one to ten were considered great or near great.

The results included Washington (number 1), Lincoln (2), F. D. Roosevelt (3), Jefferson (4), T. Roosevelt (5), Jackson (6), Truman (7), Reagan (8), Eisenhower (9), Polk (10), G. Bush (21), Clinton (24), A. Johnson (36), and Buchanan (39). Garfield and Harrison each served less than a year and were not ranked. North Carolina, of course, has a claim to James K. Polk, Andrew Jackson, and Andrew Johnson.



## SECOND PASSPORT WINNER

Kelly Frasier, a middle school student from Cary, has become the second person to complete the section's passport program by visiting all twenty-two historic sites. Kelly got her passport, looked each site up on the Internet, copied the map and directions to each site, and usually called ahead to check on times and programming changes. She set the itinerary and, with her parents' help, made the visits.

For her achievements Kelly received a certificate, her choice of twenty-five dollars' worth of books from Historical Publications, and a bag of other gifts from Archives and History and Historic Sites.

Kelly is an eighth-grade student at West Cary Middle School.

(Ed Morris)

## ACCEPTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY SPEEDING UP

People welcome new technology at an ever-faster pace. Look how long it took five technologies, after their introduction, to enter one quarter of American homes.



Source: Federal Reserve from *U.S. News & World Report*, November 13, 2000.

## PROFILE: STEVEN GREEN

Steven Green has joined the Historic Sites team at Historic Halifax as historic interpreter II. Steve graduated from Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. He earned a B.S. in business administration. He was employed by the Marriott Corporation for the past nine years.

A native of Halifax County, Steve recently moved back to the county from Raleigh. He is very excited to be back home. He worked at Historic Halifax fifteen years ago as a part-time tour guide while in school.

Steve's interests include local and state history and genealogy. He is a member of the Halifax Restoration Association, Halifax County Genealogical Society, and Halifax County Historical Association.

## PERSONNEL CHANGES

- Ted Gammon (Wolfe) began as maintenance mechanic II.